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"THE YEA AND NAY OF A MORE THAN
HUMAN ORDER, THE ONLY SUFFICIENT
FOUNDATION FOR PRIVATE AND
PUBLIC MORALITY"

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“THE YEA AND NAY OF A MORE THAN
HUMAN ORDER, THE ONLY SUFFICIENT
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“The divinest views of life penetrate most clearly into the meanest emergencies. Nothing less than the majesty of God, and the powers of the world to come, can maintain the peace and sanctity of our homes, the order and serenity of our minds, the spirit of patience and tender mercy in our hearts.”—*Martineau*.

Just whose particular business is it to teach people how they should act and to get them to act that way? Some of us have been discussing this recently. We have been discussing it here because our generation is talking about it. Ours is just an echo here of a troubled world. Whence comes an adequate morality to keep our human order a going concern?

There is a feeling abroad among us that our weakened morale comes from our uncertain morality. There is a feeling that the “Everlasting Ought” has lost its everlastingness and that this is why the note of authority has gone out of it. The master voice of ought and should and must hesitates before the question, “By whose authority?” and argues its credentials with those whom it should command. The ob-

serving and thoughtful are impressed today with the number whose morality is the link that snaps first and lets them down. We say today that we have more brains and knowledge than morality to direct them. We have more money, oil and possessions than we have integrity to handle them. We are really much concerned about a code of right and wrong, in low and in high places, effective enough to make the streets safe at night and to conduct our collective affairs. This is why there is so much discussion.

So, churchmen are asked, "Can you not do something about it? You who talk about God, and make religion your special charge, have you not been a little negligent? You ought to give us better people, you churchmen."

Now this comes with no very good grace from our modern world, this request that those who deal with the God of things should get busy about the right of things. One of our modern intellectual pastimes, in recent years, has been to trace morality to its roots without running into a God any place along the way or requiring Him even as an hypothesis to make the start. It has been shown repeatedly that morality is just as much an animal inheritance as turning to food and grasping a stick the first day we are born. We have been tracing the natural history of morals. It is so reasonable and natural because it does not require a God. The moral code is just an accumu-

lated race inheritance. We have been sure of this. Thousands of generations, blushing with shame, troubled about murder and lying, humiliated with dishonor, have bred in us to blush, to be troubled and to be humiliated about these things. We can say that through thousands of years men have so shamed and punished those who did these things; that the way of the transgressor has been made so hard and the social pressure has been so great, that it is bred in the bone for us to shudder at these things instinctively by inheritance, as we shudder at snakes. This is the natural history of morals. Morality can be traced and explained, men have said, without any resort to a spiritual order, just as history and all life can be so explained. It has seemed so much truer to us if we could keep morality close to the ground and trace it back to animals rather than connect it up with God. So, it comes strangely from our modern world to say to the church, "People are not acting very well. Can you not do something about it?"

We are asking today, "Does morality require a religion?" Through most of the history of mankind they asked just the other thing, "Does religion require a morality?" The long history of religion answered, "No, religion does not require a morality." We think of the clergy, the church, the priesthood, as being in a special sense the guardians and the teachers, the keepers, and, above all, the practicers of morality. A

religion with us that is not well up on its morality is a poor and despised thing. It has forfeited its claim to the respect and to the allegiance of men. But this marriage of religion and morality is a comparatively recent marriage. Early men did not think it strange that religion and morality were not living together. No one seeing them wandering separately asked of morality, "Where is your mate, religion?" or of religion, "Where is your mate, morality?" The priesthood and religion we think of first when there is a matter of the right and the wrong of things. "What have the clergy been doing that they have not prevented this wrong?" We say that this is their business and they ought to know about it, and, of all men, they are most responsible. This would have surprised early priests. Their business was to deal with the gods. They would have said to those who came to them about morality not going right, "Why come to us? Why do you not go to the doctors, or better to the teachers or to the academy? Our business is religion. Go to the followers of Aesculapius, or go to Socrates. He is always talking about such things. If our morality is not going well here in Athens, it is no more our concern, as priests, than it is theirs."

This was a long time ago. It is ancient history to us. With us religion and morality are married and are expected to be and few know that they were not always so. They are expected to live together and to go around together. On every matter they are

not expected to go separately and to ask separately, "What is the religion of this thing, and what is the morality of this thing?" Religion and morality are expected to go together, twain made one, with the injunction upon them that what God has joined together let no man put asunder.

This is our inheritance. The God of things is linked with the right of things. The favor of God is conditional on the thing being right. The way of morality with us is the chief highway of approach to the great God and the wrong of the thing bars that approach. Being decent is requisite for being religious. The ancient world had no such insistence from the religious side. The professional religionist and the professional moralist represented different callings.

We of the western world are a people familiar with a moral religion and a religious morality. The code for most of our people gets its authority, and its urgency not from a belief in the accumulated customs of men, but from the will of God. Our private code of morality has back of it the thunders of Sinai. Our social rightness has back of it the fiery wrath of the prophets and the pleadings of the Gospels. Our personal code for the western world is built upon the Ten Commandments; our social conscience upon Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah; our code for private thoughts on the teachings of Jesus. They put it on different grounds, the will of a great king, the wrath of a world monarch or the love of an all father. Some-

times it thunders and threatens, as it does in the Old Testament. Sometimes it beseeches and pleads as it does in the New Testament, but, whether inflamed with wrath or pleading with love, it is all about the conduct of men shot through with the authority of the all Highest, whose ear is not only heedful of their cry but also whose eye is watchful of their deeds.

The morality of the Western world, be it right or wrong, is a highly personalized morality. Philosophy and ethics do have a moral code and they have a reason why, but, the moral code of the philosophers and the teachers of ethics has had but small place among the millions of our western world. On the whole the morality of our world is known by, and expressed in, the words of Moses, Isaiah and Jesus, who are primarily great names in religious history. Their morality was but one of the conditions, although a necessary condition, in the service of the God which they proclaimed. Their morality was not something earth born or earth authorized, but was a transcendent thing. It was born on high and watched from on high. The actions of today, of the least of men, were connected up with the ultimate and everlasting power of the whole universe. Men were made to understand that those very actions which seemed to them indifferent were not so, but jarred the whole divine order that much. A man's actions were not his own but affected the great center of all; troubled the infinite mind and gave sorrow to the infinite heart.

If we are not wrong on our facts, and have not drawn the wrong conclusions from them, there is some connection between the religion and the morality of our people. Historically they have not been divorced and this, we venture, has been more effective than any other combination of religion and morals the world has seen. They have been thought of always together. They have been practiced together, and, for fifteen hundred years, they always were taught together. For fifteen hundred years one was not asked to take his religion as the voice of heaven and his morals as the voice of earth. He took both his religion and his morals as highest born. Their world was not divided, "Now let us find out about religion and about God, and now, let us close this lesson and have another lesson about your morals and how you ought to act." Men did not think in these two ways, but in one way. They got their religion and their morals together in one place, in one school. They were getting a code of life unified and authoritative, and they did not know just when they were getting one or the other, and it did not matter. This seems very desirable. If two things are one in fact in life itself, then, it is obvious that they ought to be taught together. If the moral code gets its reason why, and its authority, from religious convictions, then, they ought not to be divided.

For fifteen hundred years religion and morality

went together. Then came the great separation. Both sides agreed on the morality. They have insisted always on about the same moral code. They have agreed that religion and morality can not be separated in men's thoughts or in their lives, but, as a practical necessity, resulting from a change in human government, morality and religion had to be divorced in teaching. The world came to say that we are so well agreed on the moral code that we can teach all people together about this, but, we are so different in religion that we have to be taught separately. So we come to our modern practice, "Here is your school. You can go as far as you like in teaching morals, and you ought to do this and it is expected of you. You can mention the moral code of Moses incidentally, and of Isaiah, and you might mention Jesus just as you do Confucius, Plato and Marcus Aurelius, but, you will have to be very careful about this for you will have children before you whose parents attach widely different importance to Moses and to Jesus. You can deal with them circumspectly as teachers of morals only. You can say, "Now you must get this code of theirs into your little minds and systems and next Sunday you will all go your several ways and the right people will tell you about the religion of these men."

The disturbing fact here is that you can not teach the morals of Moses, Isaiah or Jesus, apart from their religion. You can not teach what any of them stood for in a religiously divided assembly without leaving

out the chief thing for which they all stood. Their moral code was but an incidental thing apart from their flaming, passionate utterances about God and His great will as they felt it. All the heat, all the life, all the importance, all the urgency, all the motive power, and all the meaning of their morality, came from their religious convictions. The morality of all these great teachers, taken apart from their religion, can be taught and not mention their religion, but, it will be a cold, lifeless thing. The morality of these men, apart from their religion, has everything in it except that which makes it go, and makes it important; everything except the note of authority which lays hold of men's minds and the warmth which finds their hearts. We can teach their morals without their religion, but we should understand what we are doing. We should understand just what we are doing here as we do when we teach the human body with a manikin. It has not muscle, blood or nerve. It has all but that which makes the body alive and which moves it. It is as teaching the girls the use of a stove without fire and the boys the use of an engine without steam. Apart from the life history of these men, their religious purposes interlinked with their moral struggles, their moral code would fall as dead and lifeless as an axiom of Euclid upon the ears of children and upon the ears of most adults. Apart from their religion you could not give the faintest conception of their morals. It would be as futile as

to try to teach the life of Washington to a group before whom you had to be careful not to mention his love of country because their parents were divided about whether love of country is a good thing. Evidently you would have to leave out all that moved him and that made him of the least significance.

That the best theory and practice of teaching is religion and morals taught together, as one, has long been recognized and is increasingly being recognized today. And the excellence of that theory and practice should not be confused with other matters. One may think that any particular religion that teaches religion and morals together is a false religion. One may be impressed with the practical difficulties in doing this but, that is not the matter we are considering. If a way could be found to do it, given the truest religion and the highest morality, would that morality be more effective if linked to that religion? This is what we ought to be considering. The real issue is seldom discussed and not always seen. It is hidden often behind a smoke screen of bad feelings and impugned motives.

A part of our people always have insisted that you can not ground men in a code of life apart from their religion, and they have held this to be so vital that they should not give it up. Many have availed themselves of this privilege in our own country. They may do it in church schools in the slums, or in church

schools on the best avenues. They may be ragged schools or select schools, but, whatever they are, they have this for their reason for being, that the moral code of their children and their religion are not two things, but one, and can be grounded only when taught together. It is an old theory, and no doubt a true one. If it is a theory held by those alleged to be plotting the destruction of the Republic for their ends, it is a theory held also by those most watchful of its safety. We can not damn it as a theory in the parochial schools and praise it and practice it in private schools, or in other church schools. If it is the privilege of one church group it is the privilege of another. The motives in all churches are likely to be about the same and as good in one as another. The purpose back of them all is the conviction that the moral code is best grounded when linked up with religious convictions. This is a privilege that ought not be denied in a free country. Only one of our states thus far has denied it, and denied it on every ground but the true one, that a part of our citizens believe that the only way they can send their people out with a sufficient code of conduct is to make it one with their thought about God and their eternal souls.

Can we have a morality either of truth or authority sufficient to keep us wholesome and honest apart from religion and the values it affirms? We are inclined to say today that we can; that morality can go on alone while her long time mate, religion, drops by the way.

We are inclined to say that if we can teach people enough, house them elegantly enough, feed them well enough and make them love beautiful things enough, their morality will be secure. We are inclined to say that the masses have to have a "Thus saith the Lord" to keep them straight; that they have to be made to believe that their moral code is bound up with the destiny of their eternal souls. The evidence for a morality apart from great religious convictions is not so reassuring. It is not any more reassuring among the keenly intellectual, the highly aesthetical, and the well housed and fed than among the masses. We have an increasing conviction that it takes the reality of an imperishable soul and an eternal order, which are affected by what men do, to give morality any great urgency or importance. This may be the truth about this relationship of religion and morals, "A soul occupied with great ideas best performs small duties. The divinest views of life penetrate most clearly into the meanest emergencies. Nothing less than the majesty of God, and the powers of the world to come, can maintain the peace and sanctity of our homes, the order of our world and the serenity of our minds."

